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ABSTRACT

This report details the activities of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) during 1999-2000. The accomplishments of the ECS are presented in six parts: constituent/state services; information services; conferences, workshops, and other meetings; organizational performance; key issues; and priorities for 2000 and beyond. The highlights of the agency's work include their provision of expert consultation, policy information, and technical assistance to education policy leaders; the completion of a 4-year State Leadership for Learning initiative; an improved annual electronic survey of constituent needs; and the offering of tailored services. The organization also responded to 2,625 information requests, put in place an extensive media strategy for promoting key issues, redesigned its Web site, produced more than 60 new publications, expanded distribution of ECS publications, provided learning and networking opportunities for 570 individuals, raised 5.6 million dollars during FY99, ended FY99 with a small surplus, and completed a national search for a new president. The organization also launched studies or initiatives on community colleges, trends in postsecondary education, early learning, service learning, for-profit institutions, quality teaching, and comprehensive school reform. ECS priorities will include improved leadership in states, school districts, and schools; the transformation of public postsecondary education; and the strengthening of connections between pre-K-12 and postsecondary education. (RJM)

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Education Commission of the States

Highlights

of 1999-2000

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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The mission of the Education Commission of the States is to help state leaders identify, develop and implement public policy for education that addresses current and future needs of a learning society.

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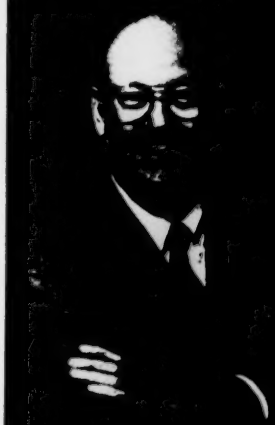
Message from the President



To ECS Commissioners and Other Constituents:

Education reform is tough work. You have to be passionate to stay at it. Under Frank Newman's leadership, the Education Commission of the States developed an enviable reputation for its dedication to the task and its willingness to tackle some of the most challenging education issues facing the nation. I am delighted to be joining such an organization as it enters the 21st Century.

In these first several months, many people have offered helpful suggestions about what they think ECS needs to do to realize the full potential everyone believes it has. I am encouraged that everyone with whom I have spoken has a sincere desire for ECS to be the premier resource for information, ideas and strategies for improving American education at all levels. They and I share a strong conviction that we can and will realize that goal.

As we go into 2001 and beyond, I believe our strengths must be multiplied by the expansion of strategic partnerships and relationships with both public- and private-sector organizations. Such connections can only enhance our ability to focus on four important areas:

- Comprehensive information in a useable form is the essential nutrient for a healthy and vigorous policy process. Therefore, we require a strong and continuing effort to increase policymakers' access to succinct, accurate and timely information. To do so, we must expand the capacity of the ECS Clearinghouse and re-engineer it for the Information Age.
- Present events, properly tracked and analyzed, can provide an invaluable window on the future. ECS has the unique potential to conduct such a process on a continuing basis, thereby providing early warning of emerging issues and problems. We must dig deeper than the surface of current events and look further into the future so ECS is positioned to help shape the future rather than only react to it. This aspect of ECS' array of strengths has the potential to be its most powerful mechanism for shaping the national debate and informing the state policy process.
- Informed discussion and debate provide the required testing ground for both the communication of ideas and the airing of healthy skepticism regarding them. Hence, we must exploit the singular capacity that ECS has to convene the right people in the right settings at the right time to comprehensively address the important education issues of the day.
- The ability to identify and define carefully the core issues appropriate for its in-depth attention is the mark of a mature organization confident of its readiness to provide optimal services on topics of primary importance to its clients. We must discipline ourselves to focus on no more than a half-dozen carefully selected issues requiring rigorous analysis to provide early, high-quality and well-informed guidance to states and others likely to be affected by them.

With this renewed focus, the next year will be one full of promise for ECS. With your support and the efforts of an outstanding staff, I look forward to the challenges ahead.

Sincerely,

Ted Sanders
ECS President

Highlights of ECS' Work for 1999-2000

Constituent/State Services

- **Provided expert consultation, policy information and technical assistance to education policy leaders in all member states and territories.** Subjects included early childhood education, teacher quality, finance, governance, urban schools, accountability, standards and assessment, community colleges, higher education, service-learning, school safety and violence, leadership, K-12/higher education partnerships, communications and other issues.
- **Completed four-year State Leadership for Learning initiative,** designed to build policymakers' knowledge base, provide opportunities for leadership development in key policy areas, and help policymakers redesign education policy that brings reform to scale in their state or territory. As a result, ECS reorganized itself to serve constituents and enhance the state policymaking environment in the following ways:
  - Assigned a staff liaison to every state to follow progress on a variety of issues, keep abreast of what key leaders are interested in and how ECS can help, and offer specific ECS services to state policymakers.
  - Designed a more efficient approach to constituent services, helping make ECS more responsive to policymaker needs in each state and increasing internal capacity to meet those needs.
  - Undertook two annual constituent needs assessments and created ECS "issue teams" to inventory, develop and package internal and external resources that can be used to help answer constituents' questions
  - Developed a "menu of services" that, for the first time, makes it easy for constituents to choose what they need from ECS. These enhanced state services range from information assistance by phone or electronically, to in-state and regional meetings, to tailored state assistance.
  - Created the in-state policy workshop as a key component of the ECS menu of products and services.
  - Expanded the ECS World Wide Web site to provide new ways of bringing information and assistance to constituents.
- **Provided tailored annual reports on ECS services** received to all member states and territories.
- **Improved annual electronic survey of constituent needs,** making it easier to use and increasing number of respondents by 10% over 1998. Used this information to help shape ECS' work with states over the past year.
- **Responded to three dozen requests** for presentations, keynote addresses, technical assistance or legislative testimony on subjects such as governance, performance management, citizenship and mentoring/reading programs in 12 states (Colorado, Washington, Louisiana, California, Kentucky, South Carolina, Idaho, North Carolina, Illinois, Florida, Indiana and Arizona) and the District of Columbia.
- **Provided tailored services to two cities and their school boards** (Cleveland and Detroit), as well as several states, on issues including standards, assessment, governance, urban reform options, rural teacher quality and service-learning.
- **Provided tailored services to California, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, South Carolina, Washington and Wisconsin** on institutionalizing service-learning into state, district and school policy and practice; to **New Hampshire, Pennsylvania** and **New York** on integrating civic and citizenship education into their curriculum; and **Colorado, Oklahoma** and **Oregon** on integrating service-learning into teacher education. Also provided information on service-learning and citizenship to more than 50 grantmakers at the National Council of Foundations and the Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service conferences.

- **Provided workshops and/or tailored state assistance** on brain research to 34 states, on accountability to 15 states and technology to eight states.
- **Evaluated services on a university/district grants program for Ohio, and conducted a study for Florida** on the need for baccalaureate degrees in five urban counties.
- **Restructured the legislative Education Chairs Network with the National Conference of State Legislatures,** creating Fall 2000 policy conference on educational leadership and implementing a new Listserv for legislators to facilitate problem solving and exchange of information.

Information Services

- **Responded to 2,625 information requests,** 35% from media representatives. Almost all responses were customized and filled within 24 hours.
- **Continued to receive high ratings from constituents** on responses to information requests, with 94% rating service as excellent or good.
- **Put in place an extensive media strategy for promoting key issues,** beginning with the Governing America's Schools initiative. The result was 33 print articles; placement of eight editorials in national newspapers (including some that were picked up by multiple papers); television and radio coverage of the issue; and interviews with members of the National Commission on Governing America's Schools.
- **Began extensive redesign of ECS Web site** to better serve constituents by making education issues more prominent and improving ease of navigation. Developed and launched new community college Web site; developed six new online discussion areas on existing site; and added new video- and audio-streaming technology to give constituents opportunity to see and hear the proceeds of important meetings without having to be there in person.
- **Produced more than 60 new publications** designed to inform and spark constituents to action in the areas of governance, comprehensive school reform, service-learning, civic education and citizenship, K-16 partnerships, teacher education, accountability, reading, standards and assessment, higher education, community college policy and other issues.
- **Continued to receive outstanding ratings and comments from constituents on publications** — 100% of readers who returned response cards rated the publications they received as good or excellent.
- **Carried out new graphic standards in design of all publications,** giving a more professional, consistent and high-quality look to all ECS printed materials.
- **ECS staff members were quoted in over 500 news articles,** an increase of over 20% from the previous year.
- **Expanded distribution of ECS publications** by placing more full-text products on the Web site for free downloading and/or viewing. At the same time, reduced money spent on print production.

Conferences, Workshops and Other Meetings

- **Conducted, co-sponsored and/or facilitated 10 state-based, regional and national policy forums and workshops** on issues including teacher quality, transforming postsecondary education, and accountability and finance for community colleges.
- **Provided learning and networking opportunities for 570 individuals** (a 22% increase over 1998) from 52 states and territories at the 1999 ECS National Forum and Annual Meeting.

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Organizational Performance

- **Raised $5.6 million during FY99,** a 137% increase over FY98.
- **Raised $39,000 (56% increase) in corporate sponsorships** for 1999 National Forum & Annual Meeting.
- **Provided nearly four dozen education grantmakers with information on key education issues** at the 1999 National Forum and Annual Meeting.
- **Ended the fiscal year with another "clean" audit.**
- **Maintained ratio of state fees to restricted funds at 43:57** (within the target range set by the Executive Committee).
- **Ended FY99 with small surplus** in a year with many unanticipated expenses.
- **Maintained zero down time on computer network** during normal business hours.
- **Completed national search for and hired a new president.**

Key Issues

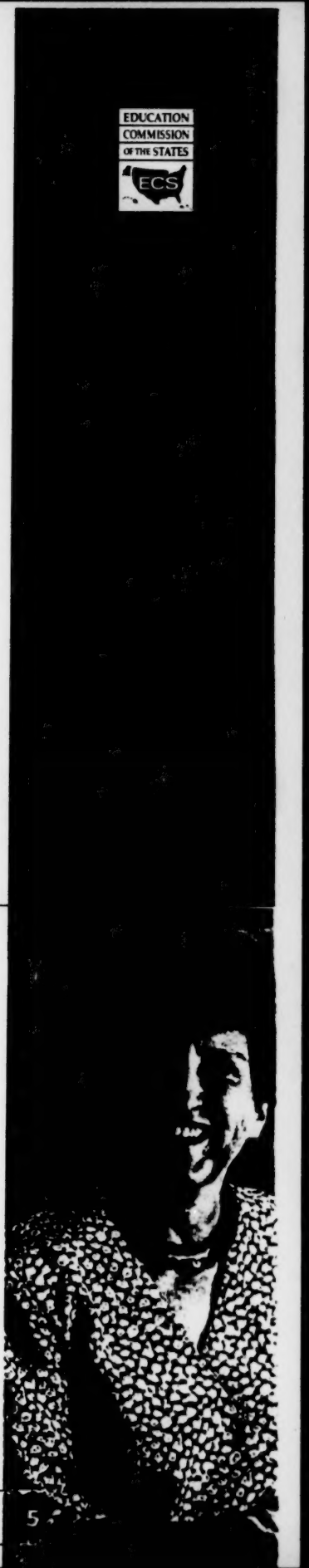
- **Governance:** Completed the work of the National Commission on Governing America's Schools. Released the group's final report *(Governing America's Schools: Changing the Rules)* and disseminated it to diverse audiences. ECS staff and National Commission members presented the report to policymakers, educators and other leaders in **Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Michigan, South Carolina, Texas** and **West Virginia,** as well as the U.S. House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. The report also is playing a key role in emerging policymaker discussions in **Massachusetts, Missouri** and **Pennsylvania.**
- **Community colleges:** Launched the Center for Community College Policy, with the support of the U.S. Department of Education. Also released the *Handbook on Community College Policy,* a collection of policy papers on issues ranging from remediation to the community college baccalaureate degree, and established a Web-based electronic information base with information about various aspects of community college policy (www.communitycollegepolicy.org). The center also undertook a comprehensive survey of how states finance their community college systems and a 50-state look at articulation and transfer policies and practices.
- **Higher education:** Undertook review of the trends transforming postsecondary education in the first of three regional meetings which attracted people from 24 states to discuss access and cost issues. Created an agenda for future postsecondary efforts by working with ECS constituents through surveys, focus groups, interviews and meetings to define the major issues policymakers will face over the next decade.
- **Early learning:** Designed and launched an initiative on early learning, under the leadership of **New Hampshire** Governor Jeanne Shaheen, 1999-2000 ECS chairman elect, with a focus on business involvement and better linking K-12 schools with early childhood needs and efforts.
- **Service-learning:** Increased district and state superintendent membership in the Compact for Learning and Citizenship by 110%. Launched the "Every Student A Citizen" initiative and facilitated work of four study groups and the National Study Group on Citizenship in K-12 Schools. Began service-learning policy review of nine states, provided technical assistance to 18 states, and participated in and/or sponsored about 20 meetings related to service-learning and its impact on student achievement.
- **For-profit institutions:** Launched a study of the rise of for-profit degree-granting institutions in America. This descriptive study seeks to understand these institutions in terms of why students attend, why faculty teach, how employers view graduates and why investors invest. Accomplishments include creation of

a matrix describing 662 of these institutions, a literature review, a survey of state regulations and an assessment of changes at regional accrediting agencies (all on the ECS Web site).

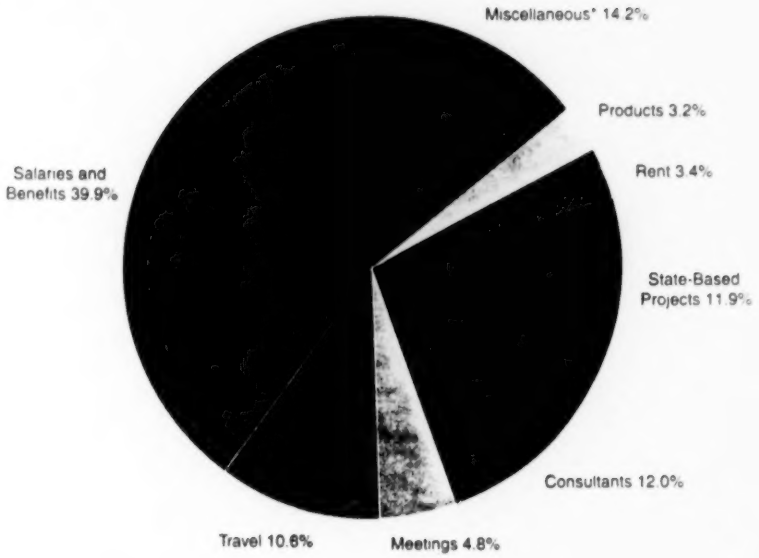
- **Quality teaching:** Sponsored precedent-setting debate between two leaders of the quality teaching movement (Linda Darling-Hammond and Chester Finn Jr.), which was made available to constituents through new Web-based technology. Invited participation in electronic discussions through the Web site and produced a capstone document, *In Pursuit of Quality Teaching: Five Key Strategies for Policymakers*, with the advice and assistance of a 32-member advisory council that included prominent business leaders, policymakers, education researchers and classroom teachers. This initiative was led by Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer.

- **Progress of Education Reform:** With support from the GE Fund, restructured ECS' annual *Progress of Education Reform* publication into a more timely, user-friendly document published six times a year.

- **Comprehensive school reform:** Funded by the Annenberg Foundation, ECS completed a five-year initiative on comprehensive school reform. During the course of this work, ECS helped policymakers become more sophisticated consumers, decisionmakers and shapers of the reform process. ECS also helped create state policies that support innovative, diverse, high-performance schools by providing technical assistance; training; national and statewide conferences; and print, video and electronic resources to policymakers and educators nationwide. In the final year, ECS produced a capstone report, *Comprehensive School Reform: Five Lessons from the Field*, provided technical assistance to a number of states developing policies that support comprehensive school reform, worked extensively with school districts introducing comprehensive school reform models to their communities, and sponsored meetings in states offering grants to districts and schools adopting these models.

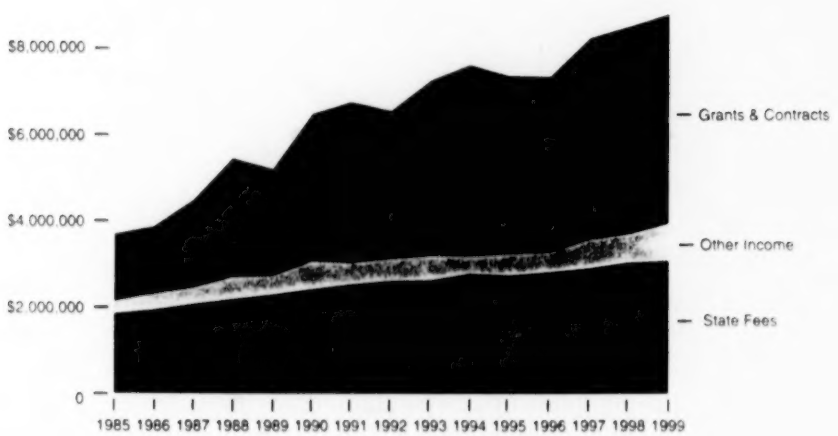


Uses of Funds — FY99



*Miscellaneous (e.g., mail and freight, subscriptions, phone, maintenance, duplication, insurance, supplies, depreciation, etc.)

ECS Revenue Sources, 1985-99



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ECS Priorities for 2000 and Beyond

Improve leadership in the states, school districts and schools.

- Lead the development of a consensus around the nature of the leadership problem and the responses needed.
- Explore possibilities for ECS to contribute in powerful ways to the development of leadership for education and educational improvement in America. Develop an organizational agenda focused on this critical issue, particularly emphasizing the need for dramatically revised content in leadership development programs.
- Enter into partnerships with foundations, professional organizations and other education institutions and organizations to explore what states can do to help develop or improve leadership initiatives.
- Work directly with and learn from states and institutions at the forefront of developing education leaders with the skills and knowledge needed to tackle today's problems, particularly in urban districts where student achievement is weak and the needs great. Share promising practices and policies with other states and districts through meetings, publications and the ECS Web site.
- Explore ways in which state policies can work together to improve leadership at the state, district and school levels in order to improve student performance.
- Explore ways in which state policy can improve the environment in which future education leaders operate by examining, for example, training, compensation, support and other issues.

Promote needed and positive transformation in public postsecondary education systems, with emphasis on state policy and strategies.

- Work directly with states at the forefront in advancing innovations in postsecondary education — particularly those related to access and opportunity, performance assessment and accountability, governance and economic and workforce development with specific attention to the nation's skill shortage, and preK-16 linkages — and share their successes with other states.
- Further the exchange of research, policies, practices and new thinking about postsecondary issues and developments across all states.
- Pursue the further development of ECS' community college policy efforts, in collaboration with other partners. Focus on activities including research and analysis; development of a Web-based electronic database on community college policy issues; production and dissemination of policy papers; organization of national, regional and state-level policy workshops; and provision of technical assistance to states.
- Explore the policy implications of the expansion of private, for-profit providers in postsecondary education.

Promote the scale-up of effective preK-12 education reform.

- Continue efforts to promote teacher quality through development of a performance-based system for preparation, certification and professional development.
- Assist policymakers in identifying and debating the major options affecting teacher quality and explore ways in which policies can work together to address the issue of teacher shortages, raise the quality of the teaching force and produce higher student achievement.
- Promote "Early Learning: Improving Results for Young Children," an ECS initiative designed to engage state policymakers and business leaders in becoming influential and effective catalysts in improving early childhood outcomes.
- Broaden participation in ECS-supported initiatives focused on service-learning and citizenship and provide constituents with information on policy options that support the use of service-learning in K-12 schools.

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- Provide information and assistance to states working to create policy environments that support innovative, high-performance schools.
- Explore the policy implications of the expansion of private, for-profit providers in preK-12 education.

Initiate and support efforts to strengthen the connections between preK-12 and postsecondary education.

- Develop strategies that improve the collaboration between preK-12 and postsecondary education, focusing on areas such as governance, structure, equity, standards, teaching, funding mechanisms and student transitions between the two levels.
- As a follow-up to ECS' initiative on "Governing America's Schools" and ongoing work on postsecondary governance issues, expand ECS' capacity to respond to the emerging needs of policymakers on preK-12 and postsecondary governance issues through these activities: identify and disseminate information and promote discussion and debate on promising policies and practices concerning innovative alternatives to governing American education; conduct research and analysis on governance innovations; and provide technical assistance to selected states and communities interested in redesigning their governance systems.
- Develop a strategy that encourages state and community leaders to work together to solve the problems of large urban districts and postsecondary institutions serving urban areas.
- Continue to track and explore innovative alternatives to current funding practices for preK-12 and postsecondary education.

Promote strategies that provide breakthroughs to high performance in the education system, preK-16.

- Create a national network for leaders interested in performance management; identify promising practices; conduct action research and policy development to create new solutions; and employ both ECS' networks and ECS' rapid-response electronic information delivery services to disseminate policy information, focusing on accountability and data-driven decisionmaking for preK-16 education, and leadership development.
- Expand ECS' efforts, both independent and collaborative, to collect and share evidence of promising practices in the performance of restructured schools, colleges and universities, and the impact of policy on that performance. Continue to strengthen ECS reports on the progress of education reform.
- Explore ECS constituent concerns regarding special education and the broader issues of federal/state relationships on education policy and programs; delineate an appropriate ECS agenda based on this exploration.
- Continue ECS initiatives to help state leaders identify and use effective strategies to strengthen communication and public engagement in education and reform.

ECS must continue to build on its strengths in gathering and synthesizing information, conducting research and policy analysis, convening policy leaders and providing technical assistance to states. It also must continue to seek partnerships with individuals, organizations, agencies and others with similar interests to gain a greater result than can be achieved by the efforts of any one organization.

For more information, see *Leadership for Results: The ECS Education Agenda for 2000 and Beyond.*

Helping state leaders shape education policy

Copies of this publication are available on the ECS Web site (www.ecs.org).

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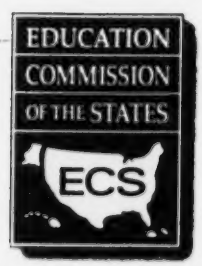
It is ECS policy to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.



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